Interview with Donald C. Bergus

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR DONALD C. BERGUS

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Donald Clayton Bergus, dob 1920, Indiana, entered the Foreign Service in 1942. This recorded conversation covers the period from 1977 when he was on the Egyptian Desk in the Department to 1977-80 when he was Ambassador to the Sudan.

Q: Mr. Ambassador, would you begin by telling us a bit about your background?

BERGUS: I was born and raised in South Bend, Indiana, and finished high school there and then went to the University of Chicago in 1938. In my senior year at college I was completing my second year in law school. Then Pearl Harbor came along. I felt very strongly about the war, it was a crusade to save humanity from barbarism. I was exempt from the armed service because of childhood asthma and so I cast about for something to do that would aid the war effort and as a result of that I was appointed a clerk in the Foreign Service in 1942 and after three months training in the Department code room, I was sent to Baghdad. The F.S. examination had been suspended prior to the war and was not given during the war. Early spring in 1945 it was given again, I took it in Baghdad, passed the written and took the oral in Washington in the fall of 19445 passed it and have been in the Foreign Service ever since.

NOTE: Here the tape skips to 1967 and Ambassador Bergus begins to describe the events leading to the establishment of the US Interests Section in the Spanish Embassy in Cairo, and the Egyptian Interest Section in Washington which was at the Indian Embassy. Since some of this report was inadvertently erased he begins again:

It was in the summer of 1967 after the Israeli invasion, sometimes called the “June War.” The Egyptians broke relations with the United States claiming falsely that we had intervened militarily on Israel's side to justify, of course, in front of their own people the tremendous defeat they had suffered at the hand of the Israelis.. After the US and Egypt agreed to open Interest Sections in each others' capitals, I volunteered to go back to Egypt and head the Interest Section there. I got back to Cairo in late July or early August of 1967. It was a fascinating time to be the there, tourism which is one of Egypt's most thriving and conspicuous industries did not exist. Hotels were empty and you could sense the feeling of defeat hanging in the air. The foreign community had by and large left, and in those first summer months we witnessed the slow restoration, the US presence such as TWA and reopening of the American University. The dialogue which had never really ceased after the rupture, went on and we continued to have day to day discussions with the Egyptians there.

Q: And you were heading the American Interest Section?

BERGUS: Yes, the office was technically part of the Spanish Embassy.

Q: How many officers or staff did you have?

BERGUS: We started with about eight and over the years it grew to almost twenty.. President Johnson gave me the rank of Minister—Minister Plenipotentiary at the Embassy of Spain is the way it looked on the records. I stayed there until early 1972.

Q: In 1968 I didn't find much action, at least reported I think Scranton made several...

BERGUS: Scranton made a trip, actually during most of 1968 the focus was on the UN. in November 1967 they finally agreed on a Resolution, #242 which among other things created a UN. mediator. A Swedish diplomat, Gunnar Jarring, was given that job and he worked throughout 1968 to try to get a peace process going. It didn't work out due to circumstances in the area and in part due to Jarring's lack of prowess. He was super careful, stodgy, unimaginative, and never made any progress. The Israelis insisted that there had to be territorial changes so that Israel would never again be put into the precarious position it was during the 1967 crisis. The Israelis wanted a peace agreement signed openly by all the parties. None of the Arabs wanted to do that, they were prepared to follow a UN arrangement but not to make an agreement with Israel. In 1968 there was a lot of activity, to-ing and fro-ing.

Q: And all this time the Soviet Union was backing Nasser—

BERGUS: Yes, though the Soviet-Egyptian relationship was far from a comfortable one. The Soviets thought it was in their best interest. They had broken relations with Israel at the outset of the 1967 War and were involved in providing military supplies to both Syria and Egypt.

Q: Military Advisers?—they ended up having a Garrison there?

BERGUS: Yes, and generally every time a new piece of equipment was sent to Egypt they (USSR) would send teams of specialists to train them so there were plenty of them around, they kept pretty much to themselves, they had their own schools for their children and at a certain age they were sent back to the Soviet Union. They didn't have much money to spend so there were an awful lot of them there but they didn't stick out like a sore thumb.

Q: Did you have opportunities to speak with Nasser?

BERGUS: Yes, my first meeting with Nasser came in January of 1968. We had been discussing through the fall of 1967 - 68 the possibility of restoring diplomatic relations We had come pretty close at one point. One thing we insisted upon was that the Egyptians withdraw the accusation that we had acted on behalf of the Israelis militarily during the war; and Nasser came close to doing that. But still my January meeting was not particularly anything to write home about. Nasser was still very suspicious of the US He had no personal confidence in President Johnson. He was positive about certain points—he thought the American University of Cairo was doing a very good job, and of course, the American oil companies were producing oil giving him not only oil but foreign exchange. On the general US-Egyptian relationship he was negative. But during January and February of 1968 he came close to restoring diplomatic relations. Just as it looked like things were going to go through, a totally different event, that is, a number of the senior officers of the Air Force were being put on trial. They had been court-martialed for their carelessness in allowing the Air Force to be destroyed on the ground in the first hours of the 1967 War. They were convicted but given very light sentences. This created a very, very bitter reaction on the part of the Egyptian people. The war had brought hardship and deaths in their families. There were riots in the streets particularly at Cairo University. This forced Nasser to reshape the internal political scene and have elections to reshape the government from the bottom to the top. Also, he let it be known that he would not restore relationship with the United States. Full relations were not restored until the spring of 1974 and so you had a seven year hiatus.

Q: Where was the American Interest Section located during this long hiatus?

BERGUS: It was situated on the grounds of the former American Embassy. The Embassy looked a little bit like an American college campus—we had taken the better part of a city block and so you had the flagship building which had housed the Ambassador and the political section, and you had the economic section and cultural affairs and the Admin

wing. We had closed all these buildings and moved everybody into a former hotel on the grounds which we acquired. We had offices there and apartments.

Q: Was the State Department/White House coming up with plans in addition to the UN efforts?

BERGUS: Yes, in addition to trying to support the UN, we put forth a number of ideas to encourage both sides to be more forthcoming but not a great deal of movement took place.

Q: In 1969 then, this scenario continued?

BERGUS: More or less, when Mr. Nixon got elected in 1970 we had a visit from Scranton who had a talk with Nasser, and we had a number of semi-high ranking emissaries coming to Egypt during this period: John McCLoy of the Chase Bank, David Rockefeller and Robert Anderson, a lot of senior non-official Americans came and saw Nasser and he always had very warm talks with them but nothing was gained. I think the point was that Nasser's main problems were being dealt with. He was getting an annual subsidy from the oil-rich states, that is Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Libya, which covered his losses from the Suez tolls so there was no great incentive for him to take any further steps. Then in late 1969 Nasser's military began to get nervous. They resented the presence of the Israelis looking at them from across the canal and they wanted to do something about it and that saw the beginning of the war of attrition, the Egyptians would lob a few shells and the Israelis would respond and the war began to get more and more bitter and the Israelis finally escalated it by aerial attacks on UAR economic targets. The Egyptians in spite of all the arms they had gotten from the Soviets were powerless to cope with this, so Nasser demanded and got Soviet Ground-to-Air missiles and planes with Russian pilots so he could redress the imbalance. This affair was getting very ugly, both we and the Soviets were getting nervous about it, we didn't want to go to war with each other over things happening on the Suez Canal. As a result we took a new initiative in the spring of 1970

which was to involve a Cease-Fire on both sides with the proviso that neither side was to improve his position during the Cease-Fire, and to resume talks through the UN. We made this proposal in June to the Egyptians. To the great surprise of everybody, Nasser agreed...

Q: Do you think Nasser was tired at this time?

BERGUS: I think that he realized he wasn't getting anywhere and saw a chance to change the situation.

Q: By this time he had placed Sadat as Vice President.

BERGUS: Yes, that was more or less a fluke. In late 1969 he had to fly to Rabat for an Arab Summit. At one time he had had 4 or 5 V.P.s including Sadat. But by late 1969 Sadat had become Speaker of the House, and the other Vice President had died or resigned. It was pointed out to Nasser as he left for Rabat that he had no successor, so more or less as an afterthought Sadat was swore in as the one remaining Vice President.

Q: Did you know him?

BERGUS: Before he assumed the Presidency I had just barely met him, anyway in the summer of 1970 a pretty active summer, we were about to do the Cease Fire which stayed in effect until the summer of 1973. But the other parts of it such as the military standstill never really did work. The Egyptians had missiles which they would move around and the Israelis would protest this. Then in the fall of 1970 Nasser died.

Q: The 28th of September?

BERGUS: Yes

Q: Did you realize that he was ill?

BERGUS: Not from any overt source, from intelligence sources which mentioned that he was ill and couldn't handle steps and that an elevator had been installed in the Residence. It was known that he was generally ill, he had diabetes and complications from it and pain in his legs. He had gone to the Soviet Union that summer for treatment but nobody knew that he was as ill as he was. Of course, in September he was put through an awful lot of stress because that was when developments in Jordan broke out—when the Palestinians in Jordan almost overthrew the Monarchy in Jordan; and Nasser didn't want to be anti-Palestinian but he also felt he owed a debt to King Hussein And they did solve it by calling the Summit Conference in Cairo and he had a very hectic three or four days and had patched together some kind of agreement; and it was at the end of the Summit Conference when he was personally saying good-by to the various heads of state and was at the airport and had just seen off the Ruler of Kuwait when he was stricken with the heart attack and died a few hours later.

Q: We sent quite a number of people to the funeral?

BERGUS: Yes distinguished people considering we didn't even have diplomatic relations.

Q: Yes, wasn't it surprising?

BERGUS: Elliot Richardson, Donald Rumsfeld, Robert D. Murphy, John J. McCloy.

Q: And also by this time Mike Sterner was on the Egypt Desk?

BERGUS: Yes, Mike Sterner was on the Egypt Desk and he came.

Q: And he then played quite a role, according to the Press? And at about that time your name starts popping up more often in the press?

BERGUS: He said he wanted peace and wanted to continue our conversations and so that was sort of the beginning.

Q: Did he seem friendlier with our Delegation than Nasser, or less suspicious?

BERGUS: We were amazed because, frankly, he was not too highly regarded before he became the President. He was a bit of a buffoon, a bit of a clown, and he used to do Nasser's dirty work for him during the time—1969—he used to go around making speeches accusing the US of being behind Israel. He wasn't taken very seriously but he was very personable and he later intimated that perhaps it was not just by chance that he was made vice president and then Nasser's successor. There may have been a higher hand in this.On the day before Christmas 1970, I was sitting in my office and I got word that President Sadat wanted to see me at his very nice house on the Nile barrages. This call came out of the blue, I didn't expect anything to happen over Christmas and I had a very loud necktie on which I didn't think was appropriate so I dashed home and changed my necktie and went out to see him. That conversation was the beginning of a series of exchanges of views over the next year which I relished very much. He was very relaxed and he called me by my first name which...and he said he really wanted peace and he thought...we could put all this other stuff behind us. He was convinced that we gave so much aid to Israel, down to the last loaf of bread, that he was convinced that the only way to get Israel out of his territory was to enlist the aid of the United States to help him. And that was a change, his predecessor Nasser and also the Foreign Minister thought that by enlisting the aid of the Soviet Union and also enlisting support from some of the NATO allies, this somehow would pressure us to pressure Israel. But this didn't work and Sadat was the first one to want to break that log jam and get directly involved in a dialogue with the United States. So it was a bit of a break to have these conversations continue until I left Egypt in January of 1972.

I was in the Department for two years and then the chance to become the DCM in Ankara came along and I was very happy to take it. The main problem that we had had until the middle of 1974 with Turkey, our great concern then was narcotics. Turkey was one of the few countries in the world that had a program whereby farmers raised opium. The

government felt that they were controlling it satisfactorily, they could sell the opium only to the government which bought it. The farmers made the raw opium themselves and sold the product to the government. Three or four years before 1974 under very heavy pressure from the United States the Turkish government had forbidden the further growing of opium. As a result they had an awful lot of very uncontented farmers. A lot of the land in Turkey is poor and there are few crop substitutes but none that paid off as well as opium did. These people had raised opium for generations—they did not use it as a rule—but it was part of their culture. When you take the opium out of a poppy it comes in sort of a round gummy ball and they would hold back three or four and hide them some place and that was to take care of their daughter's dowry once she got married. It was a form of savings.

The system was not foolproof as the Turkish government said it was, there was an awful lot of leakage into illicit channels. So we talked the government into banning the production completely and they were able to enforce it. The Turkish government was generally pretty strong, but they had an awful lot of discontented farmers on their hands. We tried to give them dairy cattle and other substitute crops, but it did not work. There had been an election in early 1974 and the successful party had campaigned on the fact that they would restore the opium trade.

Q: Did you understand Turkish?

BERGUS: I could, from Arabic, generally get the drift about what they were talking. Turkish is a lovely language. Anyway, when I was preparing to go out to Turkey all my briefings were based around the problem of “you have got to do something about this opium trade.” As a matter of fact Bill Macomber was back on consultation just before I was to leave. What happened in Cyprus was that a group of Cypriot nationalists under the care and guidance of the military dictatorship in Greece pulled a coup and overthrew Archbishop Makarios. [July 1974] This got the Turks all upset because they were convinced, and not without reason, that this lot would do their best to harry the Turkish minority out of the land. They had to do something about it. So we arrived back days before the Turks

began the invasion of Cyprus. That was a pretty busy summer. The Turks landed and in two waves of military operations they grabbed the northern third of the island, which they still hold— forty percent of the island. There was a lot of to-do about that. You got into a lot of domestic politics. There is not much of a Turkish vote in this country, but there is a Greek vote and Greek-American legislators. I found this all very interesting because my father was born in Greece. He came to the United States and married my mother, who is of Pennsylvania Dutch stock, and there it was. So as crisis go it was a pretty good crisis that summer. We had the Cyprus problem on our hands and the constant threat from Congress, which they eventually made good, that unless the Turks got out of Cyprus they were going to cut off aid, which in fact they did. Then we still had this opium problem.

The opium problem, oddly enough, we “solved” and I think rather well. Science came to our rescue, in that a farmer could raise the poppies and then instead of the process in which he took the opium from the poppy by bleeding the poppy at a certain stage of its development, he allowed the poppy head to die and sold the dry poppy head to the government at a good price and certain pharmaceutical factories were able to extract a narcotic from those dry poppy heads. One of the things that made it easy to enforce is that to take narcotic from a dry poppy head is a very complex manufacturing process which you can't conceal and there were only two or three factories in the world at that time capable of this process. While converting raw opium to heroin you can do in a garage. All the narcotics traffickers were able to do that very easily. So it was a very effective answer to the problem. The farmer got to raise his poppies, the legitimate narcotic trade had a source of supply and interestingly enough, one of the facts that came out of this, this was just about the time that MEDICARE was about to take hold in the United States and allow a lot of elderly people, who had not been able to afford to go to doctors, to go to doctors. As a result the demand for codeine and other legitimate opium products was going way up. So we were very happy to get this Turkish source of supply.

Anyway the opium problem was, as far as most diplomatic problems were concerned, solved within a matter of some months. But the Cyprus problem remained and it was still flourishing when I left Turkey in 1977.

Q: Didn't Congress offer to cut off aid to Turkey because of the Cyprus situation?

BERGUS: They did indeed. They did not only debate cutting it off, but they cut it off. This was during the Ford administration. Twice Ford vetoed the bills aimed at cutting off aid to Turkey and the second veto was overridden and aid was cut off. Therefore the Turks suspended operations on the network of bases we had had in Turkey, which in those days were very important. Now we only had one base, Incirlik, which we still have, and which by the way we have just received permission to use against Iraq. That was the only operating military base in Turkey, the rest were all listening posts. By listening posts I mean electronic listening posts. These facilities were very important to us because of them we were able to monitor the Soviet missile program.

When we suspended aid to Turkey, the Turks suspended operation of our bases and there was an awful lot of very good military intelligence we lost for a couple of months because of that. Relations got quite tense. There were always our day to day relations with the government and the Foreign Ministry which were very good. The Turks are a mature people. They have a small foreign office but professionally one of the best foreign offices in the world, and extremely capable. So we managed, but we had all sorts of housekeeping problems. They suspended some of the free entry privileges which our military enjoyed in Turkey and all that kind of day to day housekeeping problems. These were not exciting but time consuming and they meant an awful lot to a lot of people.

Q: Let us go back once again to the time of Markarios's ouster in 1974. Did you have a feeling that this was expected or anticipated either in the United States or in Turkey?

BERGUS: No, I don't think so. There certainly had been plenty of tension between the Greeks and Turks over Cyprus, there had been in the early '60s a threat that the Turks were going to take over the island because under Makarios the Turkish minority got more and more hemmed in, freedom of movement was denied them and they had a pretty rough life. The Turkish government just did not want to tolerate this behavior. That crisis was resolved, partially, and then there was the military coup in Greece, April 22, 1967. But this business of knocking off Makarios and trying to declare immediate union with Greece came as a surprise.

Q: Was Makarios against enosis?

BERGUS: He was against it because he was a big frog in a little puddle and he wanted to keep his puddle. The Turks, who detested Makarios, at least knew him. They did not rejoice when Makarios was thrown out of office, they got ready for war because they knew that these people on the mainland were working on enosis and they would not, as they said were hemmed in by these islands and their only outlook in the Mediterranean, was to the south, and you make Cyprus part of Greece, then we are really hemmed in. So they felt very strongly about it and they felt very strongly about the humiliation suffered by the Turkish minority on the island.

Q: The press was always talking at the time about our Greek bases and the junta was threatening to call for our withdrawal.

BERGUS: They were both playing it, the Greek bases, they were more interesting from a military operations and logistics thing, naval facilities in Crete and the airport in Athens while the Turkish bases had become much more interesting from the intelligence viewpoint.

Q: Couldn't we have moved the naval base to Izmir?

BERGUS: I don't think that ever came up. You know that once the military gets a base they will tell you that the whole world depends on it. There was never any question, they wanted those Greek bases, they had put a lot of money in them. As a matter of fact, as I recall, they had had a scheme whereby they were going to “home port” ships in Greece, which meant that you would have permanent military colonies around them, just like our base in the Philippines.

Q: There was a headline from that period in which it was claimed that the US backed Cypriot independence but did not appear to be displeased at the Makarios ouster.

BERGUS: Well I think that was the case because Makarios had been playing footsie with the Russians and he was not a very attractive person—at least from the point of view of our government. He was intriguing and that sort of thing.

Q: Of course Sampson who came in was...

BERGUS: He was just a thug, a pure thug.

Q: He did not last very long.

BERGUS: One thing in the decade before 1974, Turkey had exported a lot of laborers to Europe, particularly to Germany, and particularly to Berlin. These people, hard working, did a lot of the scut work that the Germans did not want to do, they got well paid and sent it back to Turkey. So you could go to a Turkish village and see two or three houses that had been fixed up and really looked well—you could say, “Ah, ha, there are German workers in those villages.” As a result of this the Turks, probably for the first time in their history, had tremendous reserves of foreign exchange, which they had never had before. All this went along very well until the 1973 Middle East war and the increase in oil prices. This swallowed up the Turkish foreign exchange surpluses very fast and also slowed down the economies of Europe and the Turkish workers started to come home and tried to live off the economy. That was one of the sources of unrest. Then you had the students who, like

students everywhere at that time, were against the established order. Remember Vietnam was just drawing to a bloody close, so you had great unrest there, then you had a pan-Islamic movement, which you still see in the Middle East, of conservatives who wanted to undo all the reforms that Ataturk had done—make Islam the state religion, reveil the women. This had a certain amount of power behind it, and you even had a pan-Turanian movement who wanted to reconstruct the glorious Turkey of history, which probably never existed, which extended through the southern Soviet Union, almost to Mongolia. So you had economic unrest, all these competing forces, you had constant unrest, particularly among the students and they played pretty seriously at it. I was shocked, you had high school demonstrations with high school students shooting at each other with real guns. It was a very frightening thing.

Q: Where did they get the guns?

BERGUS: Well, you can get anything. As this went on the question came, when is the army going to take over again? They won't put up with this for long. The Cyprus thing gave Ecevit a year's lease on life because of his action protecting Turkish interests in Cyprus by making sure that Cyprus did not become a threat to Turkey, was very popular. The Turkish army fulfilled its mission in a way that gratified the Turkish people, but as this began to wear thin all this other unrest developed. So it was a fairly insecure place.

Q: Didn't they have difficulty with their Iraqi border?

BERGUS: Well, they had a Kurdish problem, but in my day they solved the Kurdish problem by saying the Kurds did not exist, that the Kurds were mountain Turks, they were not separate.

Q: Wasn't there a Kurdish refugee problem along with an Armenian one?

BERGUS: Yes. The Armenian situation had pretty well been solved in 1915 when the Armenians were exported or massacred. But they had this Kurdish unrest on the border,

so the country was relatively calm, but they had demonstrations and they had difficulties. And they had incredible inflation. I think—don't hold me to these numbers—that when I went there something like 700 Turkish lira to the dollar and when I left it was 3000, something incredible, an increase in inflation. So you had all sorts of basis of discontent within the country.

Q: Did Kissinger come over?

BERGUS: He came over twice while I was there. The first time he had some spare time, he was in the Middle East negotiations and there was a hiatus of three or four days while either the Egyptians or the Israelis were preparing answers, so he came to Turkey. He did not perform very brilliantly there and did not get anywhere, and then he came another time for a CENTO meeting. CENTO was the long-since deceased treaty we had—a defense arrangement between Turkey, Iran and Pakistan. That had been started by John Foster Dulles and never really got off the ground and Iraq was part of it but after the Iraqi revolution in 1958, that was really the end of that pact, but it was still there.

Q: Kissinger liked to talk on the telephone a lot. Didn't he call the Turkish government a lot?

BERGUS: Well he called them fairly often, and Kissinger basically was concerned about maintaining our defensive alliance with Turkey to the point where the Greeks thought he had gone completely pro-Turk. They had cartoons of him in the papers in Athens showing him wearing a Turkish fez—even though the Turks had abolished the fez fifty years before. So he made himself persona non grata with the Greeks but he did not do too well with Turks either, so he did not cover himself with any brilliance with the Cyprus dispute.

Q: He made some remarks about Makarios, that Makarios was dead politically.

BERGUS: That I don't recall.

Q: I saw that in a newspaper article, and Makarios threatened to return.

BERGUS: He did return and died in his bed in office.

Q: Were the Turks upset about his returning?

BERGUS: By that time they had in their hands what they wanted and they were going to keep it.

Q: How did the Turks feel about Demirel?

BERGUS: They elected him while I was there. He beat out Ecevit—he really didn't beat him out, but he was able to—by that time the Turkish left had broken into a million pieces so Denktash was able to put together a coalition of the center right and far rightist parties. He had the Muslim extremists and the pan-Turanian extremists in his government, some of whom were a pretty merry lot I can tell you. Anyway in my last months there we kept saying to each other, “When is the army going to step in?” which they did after I left. I was there into early 1977.

Q: In 1975 the Vietnam war came to a bloody end, did that affect the Department of State's or Government's attention to what was happening on Cyprus?

BERGUS: I think that did. I think pasting together the Middle East after the '73 war did. Greece and Turkey did not get the attention they'd gotten say a decade earlier.

Q: Is that while they were looking for more aid from Libya?

BERGUS: Well, the pan-Islamic people, who were basically anti-western in Turkey, were saying, “We should not mess around with these Americans who treat us so mean and are pro-Greek anyway underneath and if we would just get rid of the Americans, the Libyans, the Saudis and all those would come in and give us all we need if we become a good

Moslem state." Which was baloney on its face and most Turks realized that was baloney because although they are Moslems they ruled the Arabs for many centuries.

Q: They are not Arabs?

BERGUS: No, Turkish is a completely different language. The idea of depending on Arabs for assistance was not very attractive for most Turks.

Q: Is there a memory in Turkey of their Ottoman empire?

BERGUS: Oh yes, they still have, for example, the foreign minister under Demirel, was an old Ottoman gentleman. He still wrote his Turkish in Arabic script which had been abolished forty or fifty years before. So you had people who remembered the Ottoman days.

Q: Was there an awareness that they were the last most important part of the Roman empire?

BERGUS: Yes, you have Roman ruins as far inland as Ankara, all over the place, Izmir and that whole area. They are very proud of their heritage. They have created a pretty impressive school of Turkish archeologists of those periods.

Q: In 1975 student unrest was exploding there, and the exported terrorism, I am thinking of the murder of the two Turkish ambassadors, one in Paris and one in Vienna. How did this effect your work?

BERGUS: That was Armenian irredentism and we worried a great deal about terrorism, Palestinian mostly because Turkey was close enough to the area and Istanbul is a place where people can come and go freely so Palestinians could come in. Shortly after I left Palestinians took over the Egyptian embassy and held it for three or four days until the Turks rousted them out in Ankara. So we had enough of it around. And then you add Greek terrorism, our ambassador in Cyprus at the time, Rodger Davies, who was a very

close friend of mine, was murdered and we are pretty sure now and when I was there that the evidence was that it was Greek terrorism. So we had enough of it around.

Q: In Davies case they arrested six Greek Cypriot policemen and they got off with some two weeks sentences or something.

BERGUS: If I knew it I had forgotten it.

Q: Terrorism against Turkish diplomats was evident all over the place, I remember the Turkish consulate in Hamburg putting up all kinds of iron gates, it looked like the Israeli consulate.

BERGUS: The Israeli embassy in Ankara was pretty well protected too.

Q: At about this time there was the Lockheed scandal, did you get involved?

BERGUS: Not really, although the Turks did have some Lockheed aircraft. As I recall they were supplied by the US government either as aid or military sales, so I don't believe the Turks were involved in that, not to any great extent anyway. You didn't have Lockheed buying whole governments the way they did elsewhere apparently.

Q: As I recall the Turks allowed the PLO to open its office in Turkey.

BERGUS: That could have been, I just don't remember it. That would have been under the Demirel government and he had some of these pan-Islamic people in his government. That could well have happened, I draw a blank on that one.

Q: Do you recall the problem that was with the Lithuanian hijacking?

BERGUS: Oh boy, do I remember that. I was on the front lines on that one. This was a Lithuanian and his son and they had hijacked an aircraft in the Soviet Union, flown it to Turkey and in the process of it they shot and killed the stewardess of the Soviet aircraft.

The Turks were under heavy pressure to turn this man and his son over to the Soviets. That they refused to do. The two of them were tried and convicted. They served prison terms which were so many years, I can't remember, and then after they had served their prison terms they were put in an internment camp in Turkey.

One morning in the late spring or early summer we were minding our own business and our consul, who was Jane Whitney, came up with her eyes about to pop out said that these two characters had just come in and were about to claim asylum. We were in a heck of a dilemma. They wanted asylum in the United States, the Russians still wanted them, and these were in their way freedom fighters, but they had after all killed a person. It was a fairly messy business. Anyway we gave them asylum in the embassy until we could sort things out. We notified the Turks and we notified Washington. The next twenty-four to forty-eight hours we had some problems on our hands. It so happened, it rarely gets hot in the summer in Ankara, but in that particular period we had a heck of a heat wave and that did not make anybody any happier. We finally worked out a deal whereby we would return the young man and his father to Turkish jurisdiction. They would then, after twenty-four or forty-eight hours, put them on a plane to Rome where a Lithuanian prelate would look after them and send them on to Venezuela which was accepting Lithuanian refugees at that time. They had given assurances that they would accept these two people. So we then had the job of persuading the father and son to go along with this.

The only way we could talk to the father was through the son who had some English. The father has some rudimentary Turkish and of course Lithuanian. We did our best to explain to them what would happen. I went down to explain. The father was adamant, he said, “These promises from the Turks, I won't trust them. They will probably turn me over to the Russians.” I explained that, “They did not give these promises to you, they gave them to the United States and I can assure you that when they give promises to the United States that is quite a different thing.” We had great trouble. Finally we even brought out a lady, a very attractive middle aged lady of Lithuanian extraction, who was a senior executive in one of the big defense organizations in the United States and who was sort of the head of

a Lithuanian organization. Actually by the time she got out there we had finally persuaded the Lithuanians to give themselves to the Turks but she helped push the deal through. In the course of it, to make his point, the father, pulled out a little bitty pen knife and stabbed himself in the stomach with it. There was a fairly superficial wound. We had the US Army doctors there and they patched him up in no time, put a little bandage on it. Finally we completed the deal. It was all like something out of a novel. The Turks took a five lira note, which was worth about a penny, and tore it in half, and gave me half. I was supposed to identify myself when I brought the two to the Turks. All that sort of hocus pocus. They were delivered to the Turks about eleven o'clock at night. They were immediately taken to Istanbul, put in the hospital there for two or three days and then flown to Rome. Then theoretically they were flown to New York where they were to be immediately transferred to a flight to Venezuela. We did not want to have anything to do with them as they had been involved in this murder. Anyway as things so often work, the plane they came in on went to Kennedy airport and the plane to Venezuela took off from La Guardia airport. On the bus between the two places the two people got off and disappeared for a while. When they caught them they were in Boston, I believe, and the young man was married to an American girl of Lithuanian extraction. I don't know how it was ever sorted out after that, but I breathed a sigh of relief once they got out of our consular district, but that was a pretty exciting couple of days.

Q: Was this not about the same time that the Soviet aircraft carrier came through the Bosporus?

BERGUS: I guess I was still there when that happened. I know there was a great debate, was it an aircraft carrier or was it not? After all it was for the Turks to interpret the straits treaty. They said it was not and they let it through. But that was read by some to show that the Turkish government was going neutralist on us, etc., etc. There was a lot of to-ing and fro-ing on that one.

Q: Were you there when Makarios died in 1977?

BERGUS: I think it was after I had left.

Q: You were there when Consul General Moffitt's residence was sprayed with gunfire in Izmir?

BERGUS: Yes. We went down there.

Q: Who did that, what was going on there?

BERGUS: I frankly can't remember.

Q: There was a bomb in a garden. There were a lot of bombs.

BERGUS: The hotel in Ankara was a transit one for military people, that had a bomb on the ground floor— not too far from my house as a matter of fact. There was a lot of that going on. The Communists were then in about two or three factions and I think it was one of those that did it.

As a bystander today following things, the fact that this Turkish government at great expense to itself has lined up with us in the anti-Iraq coalition because one of the few good sources of Turkish foreign exchange is that pipeline that goes from Iraqi oil fields to the Mediterranean. Not only the fact that the Turkish government but the parliament has voted to allow us to use Incirlik airbase for operations with the coalition, I think we have done damn well in Turkey. The Cyprus problem is not solved except that you have in effect a partition although both sides say, “Oh no, sooner or later we will make a federation there”. But as far as our objectives are concerned we have not done at all badly in Turkey. Now given what has happened in the Soviet Union, whether all those advanced electronic bases are still that important to us any more, I just do not know.

Q: During your period there, there were several serious earthquakes.

BERGUS: Our response was good in a way. There was one serious one when I was there. We had trouble responding appropriately. We sent out huge hospital groups. One thing that we did not realize, which the old Turkish hands did realize, that in a Turkish earthquake if you are in your house—remember these are stone houses with heavy roofs on them—that if an earthquake strikes, you probably are dead, and if you are not in your house you probably are alive—and there are very few cases in between that require hospitalization. So we responded with a lot of that. We would dump a lot of stuff on them which they could not use. I know that when the earthquake hit the German ambassador took the line that, “We will give more aid when the aid we sent for the last earthquake is released from Turkish customs”. It had been there all that time. It just shows the cultural gap that remained.

I remember the earthquake when I was there that one of the best things we did—it was out in a remote place with an ordinary airstrip—we sent out a team with an aircraft controller and because of that they were able to stage aircraft through there at a much faster rate than would have been the case if there had only been primitive windsox and that sort of thing. That made a deep impression on the Turks and on the other donor countries. They could send their stuff down by aircraft and it could actually get to the scene of the devastation very quickly and effectively.

Q: At this time the announcement came out that you were being nominated as ambassador to Sudan to succeed Bill Brewer. Had you anticipated this assignment, and how did you feel about returning to the Arabic speaking world again?

BERGUS: Well, the Department being what it is, I had been told that I was on a list and so I was very pleased and when it actually came through I was very happy. I was very happy to be going to the Sudan which at that time held the attention of the world, they had just discovered that it had great potential as a food producing country. They had not long before resolved—they thought—the age-old conflict between the north and the south in the Sudan. Nimeiri was the president and he seemed a common-sense sort of fellow. I

was close to Sadat and Sadat commended him. Everybody in the Arab states, who are chronically short of food, looked upon Sudan as a place for investment to make the Arab world more independent in food and they had dreamy ideas, so there was a lot of illusion. Not without a base, a lot of it. Chevron of California was exploring for oil in the country and they had considerable hopes of finding some. It was a country that had a lot a arable land that was lying idle, adequate supplies of water, under international treaty they had the rights to quite a bit of the Nile system, which could be put to good use. So it looked like everything was going to come up roses.

Q: This was the twentieth anniversary of...

BERGUS: Of their independence from Great Britain, from the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan.

Q: Did the Egyptian flag fly there?

BERGUS: It just flew, when Kitchener took the Sudan there were some British troops, but most of the troops were Egyptian, and the Egyptians footed the bill. The British were very good at getting their natives to pay for any imperial role and there had been a severe dispute in Cairo in 1922 between the Egyptians and the British. The commander of the British forces in the Sudan, who happened to be in Cairo at that time, was assassinated. Using that as the reason, the British just froze the Egyptians out of the condominium except in name, and ran the country until it became independent in 1955 or 1956.

Q: It seems to me that Africa is full of crazy, nonsensical boundaries, drawn in pencil by someone at his desk 5,000 miles away. The Sudan seemed to be one of those.

BERGUS: I would say yes, but it had the redeeming feature that it is a big country and if you ever managed to paste it together you would really have some to deal with. If you were to divide the Sudan by ethnic or linguistic standards you would have about thirty or forty little-bitty postage stamps that were not worth anything.

Q: Aren't there basically three large ethnic divisions?

BERGUS: In a sense you can say two. You have the northern two-thirds being Moslem and the southern one- third is animist or Christian and Nileotic, speaking a host of languages. The others are Moslems—very recent converts - until about the thirteenth or fourteenth century the Sudan was primarily a Christian country because of the Ethiopian influence.

They had a civil war, but Nimeiri had solved that, we thought, and the country had some pretty good days ahead of it. But it did not work out that way.

Q: What happened?

BERGUS: All sorts of things happened. For one thing economic promise had been over-blown. The investment was never made. For another, arrangements whereby the north and the south were to live together came apart and that had a direct impact on their oil situation. Just a few months before I left I remember the American people in the oil company had gotten me out of bed in the middle of the night, they had just made some very significant discoveries. But as fate would have it that oil straddled the north-south line and the oil is far enough inland that to get it to world markets you have to use of pipeline. And there has never been enough security in that area to allow such an investment.

Another thing that happened—they say this after I left- -that Nimeiri's mental health failed to such an extent that he became much more fanatically Moslem than he had certainly been in my day. He went along with those in the north who periodically tried to Islamize the south by force so that opened up the civil war again and it has just been a pathetic mess ever since. It is a pity because this vast area with all these resources, the human resources are also very good, is just foundering there with starvation. It is a country that should be feeding a good bit of Africa and the Middle East.

Q: Did they ever solve that problem of the irrigation program?

BERGUS: The canal? I think they got a good start on it and then, I think, it fell a victim to the civil war, the unrest. That was very controversial among hydrologists.

Q: Who was engaged in the civil war?

BERGUS: The Moslems and the southerners.

Q: I don't think most of the rest of the world is aware of what is going on there.

BERGUS: It is far off. The numbers of people involved are not that great. Fortunately or unfortunately they fight each other with ordinary weapons. You don't have any threat of bacteriological weapons or that sort of thing. Then you have the unrest of the rest of the area. Nimeiri was very much opposed to the pro-Soviet Ethiopian rebels so they would help the southern dissidents in the Sudan to check him. Then you had the Eritreans from Ethiopia flooding into the Sudan as refugees.

Q: Whom did they side with?

BERGUS: They just wanted to make a living because the Eritreans themselves are divided between Christians and Moslems.

Q: I remember the Soviets were involved in something and closed their embassy and left in a huff at one point.

BERGUS: Well, they pulled their ambassador out. There was still an ambassador there when I left. They had been close to Nimeiri at one point and then he turned against them and they cut off aid and stopped giving spare parts for military equipment.

Q: How did Nimeiri get along with Nasser?

BERGUS: He was only in power for the last bit of Nasser's rule. I first met him at Nasser's funeral. He got along with Sadat but Sadat patronized the Sudanese, which they do not particularly like. Despite what they say, and despite the fact that the Sudanese of the north are fanatic Moslems, color within the Moslem and Arab world generally is still a factor. They will say, of course, “We are all brothers in Islam” but color is still a factor and don't kid yourself when they say it isn't.

Q: While you were in the Sudan were you getting much attention from the United States?

BERGUS: Yes. First of all Nimeiri was the one Arab leader who gave wholehearted support to Sadat in the Camp David process and all that. That was when the Iraqis first got delusions of leading the Arab world and taking it away from the Egyptians. Nimeiri was Egypt's one close and good friend. So on the basis of that I got a lot of aid out of the Department for Sudan.

Q: They got $27 million for special grants from IMF.

BERGUS: They got quite a bit from us.

Q: The Dutch canceled their debt at this time. The Sudanese were at that time $600 million in debt—it doesn't sound like anything today.

BERGUS: For Sudan that was a lot of money.

Q: It was said that their development plans were too ambitious.

BERGUS: Yes, that was right. I got so tired of the IMF and the World Bank. They have a patent compound. They come to all these countries and say, “Stop expenditure, reduce imports, etc., etc.” and these are all third world guys themselves living in Bethesda [a wealthy Washington, D.C. suburb] and places like that in fancy houses paid by the

international community. Then they immediately become hard-faced bankers once they get to Washington. I don't have too much time for them.

Q: Now in 1979 were they having trouble with Egypt on the Jomblat canal?

BERGUS: That was not a real problem. The theory was that once you built the Jomblat canal you were in effect creating an additional amount of Nile water and under the terms of the Egyptian-Sudanese agreement some of that water would go to Egypt. But there was no blood spilled over that issue. It was there, but nobody got very excited over it. They knew that once it was done they would work out something.

Q: Had things gotten bad economically?

BERGUS: The debt kept piling up and then the Christian-Moslem thing came up. That was when the Ikhwan (Doctrinaire Moslem Brethren) grew in power.

Q: Strategically, did we feel that Sudan was part of what we call the Horn?

BERGUS: No, Sudan is sort of on the edge of the Horn. The idea was that we were concerned about Soviet influence growing in the Horn and a developing, relatively happy Sudan would be a good thing to use against them, to counteract it. I think we expected much too much. It could have been, it had everything. There is so much that could have been done with that country plus they have oil.

Q: You never hear of the oil.

BERGUS: The oil companies are not worried—they say the safest place to keep it is in the ground. It is there and they know it. Someday it is going to be used. And the human resources—they are nice people. Their university had very high standards. The Sudanese were very highly regarded in Saudi Arabia and other oil states because they spoke Arabic and they spoke English and they did not mess in local politics. That was sucking away

talent from the Sudan, at vast expense training these people in the university and then having them get on the next boat to Saudi Arabia.

Q: I wonder if they are coming back now?

BERGUS: Most of the Sudanese are on the Western side of the Arabian peninsula, in the Hejaz. They were not in the oil fields. They were merchants, accountants and the like.

Q: How were relations with Ethiopia?

BERGUS: Difficult, while I was there. The Eritrean problem was an issue. The Ethiopians have cause for complaint. The Eritreans were getting help in their military struggle against Ethiopians and they were getting help through Sudan, not so much from Sudan.

End of interview